

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9017

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

USIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR NG

SUBJECT: AMERICAN JOURNALISTS IN NIGER

REF: A. NIAMEY 2325 (NOTAL)

B. STATE 191691 (NOTAL)

C. PARIS 21410 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: GON IS NOT GEARED UP TO DEAL SATISFACTORILY WITH VISITING JOURNALISTS. ACCORDINGLY, AMERICAN JOURNALISTS WHO INQUIRE SHOULD BE ADVISED EITHER TO GIVE EMBASSY SEVERAL WEEKS ADVANCE NOTICE IF THEY WISH US TO PAVE WAY FOR THEIR VISIT OR GO THEIR OWN WAY AND FACE CONSEQUENCES WHICH MAY BE CONSIDERABLE INCREASE IN THEIR BLOOD PRESSURE AND LITTLE OR NO STORY. END SUMMARY.

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1. PROBLEM OF RELATIONS BETWEEN GON AND AMERICAN JOURNALISTS WISHING FIND OUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN NIGER HAS HAD ITS UPS AND DOWNS, MOSTLY LATTER. IN LAST WEEK OR SO WE HAVE PLUNGED TO NEW DEPTHS.

2. DURING THIS PERIOD, VISITING AMERICAN JOURNALISTS HAVE INCLUDED:

A. NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TEAM OF CANBY AND RAYMER. STOPOVER HERE WAS TOTAL BUST. WITH GON FOREKNOWLEDGE, EMBASSY ARRANGED VISIT OF TEAM TO AGADEZ WHERE PREFET WHO ALLEGEDLY HAD NOT RECEIVED WORD REFUSED THEM PERMISSION TO TAKE PICTURES. ON RETURN TO NIAMEY, AUTHORITIES DENIED THEM PERMISSION TAKE PICTURES LOCALLY OR VISIT NEW LAZARET CAMP UNTIL INTERIOR MINISTRY COULD ACT ON REQUEST WITH FULL DETAILS OF SCHEDULE ENDORSED BY EMBASSY. SINCE THIS PROCESS TAKES SEVERAL DAYS, TEAM PACKED UP AND WENT ON TO KENYA WITH A FEW PICTURES TAKEN SURREPTIOUSLY, SOME IMPRESSIONS OF DROUGHT SITUATION BASED ON EMBASSY AND OTHER BRIEFINGS AND UNCHARITABLE THOUGHTS ABOUT GON.

B. ROBERT WATERS OF NEWSDAY WHO DESCENDED UNANNOUNCED ON NIGER FROM ZAIRE WHERE HE WAS COVERING ALI-FOREMAN FIGHT. HAVING EXTRA TIME, HE DECIDED LOOK AT SAHEL DROUGHT. AFTER TRYING UNSUCCESSFULLY GET PERMISSION TO VISIT INTERIOR HE APPARENTLY SAID WRONG THING TO INTERIOR MINISTRY OFFICIAL. WITHIN HOURS HE WAS REPORTEDLY TOLD TO LEAVE COUNTRY ON NEXT PLANE WHICH HE DID.

C. KENRY KAMM, ROVING CORRESPONDENT OF NY TIMES OPERATING OUT OF PARIS WHO IS VISITING SAHEL FOR TWO MONTHS AND DECIDED START WITH NIGER. HE SPENT WEEK HERE, SLIPPED OUT OF TOWN ON SEVERAL TRIPS PENDING OFFICIAL PERMISSION WHICH NEVER CAME, GOT INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT AFTER EMBASSY ENDORSED HIS APPLICATION AND FAILED OBTAIN PERMISSION TO VISIT AGADEZ TO COVER ARRIVAL OF ALGERIAN CONVOY AND TRANSPORTING AMERICAN FOOD GRAINS. FRUSTRATED AND ANNOYED AT RUN-AROUND FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS, KAMM CUT SHORT HIS VISIT.

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3. IN ALL THREE CASES, WE BELIEVE JOURNALISTS LEFT SATISFIED WITH EMBASSY EFFORTS THEIR BEHALF. AT ONE POINT, AFTER PARTICULARLY TRYING HASSLE WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS KAMM ANGRILY INQUIRED WHY EMBASSY DID NOT PROTEST GON RESTRICTIONS ON AMERICAN JOURNALISTS DOING THEIR JOB BY COVERING AMERICAN DROUGHT RELIEF EFFORTS. HOWEVER, AFTER WE POINTED OUT THAT ANY PROTEST WOULD PROBABLY LEAD TO THROWING JOURNALIST OUT OF COUNTRY OR GON INSISTENCE ON

EMBASSY ENDORSEMENT OF JOURNALIST AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY
FOR HIS COPY -- ARRANGEMENT WHICH WE DOUBTFUL EITHER USG
OR NY TIMES WOULD FIND ATTRACTIVE -- KAMM BACKED DOWN.

4. AS RESULT THESE EVENTS, WE HAVE AGAIN ATTEMPTED TO
CLARIFY GON THINKING AND PROCEDURES REGARDING VISITING
JOURNALISTS. AMBASSADOR RAISED MATTER WITH ACTING FONMIN
AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION LAST WEEK AND EMBOFFS
HAVE FOLLOWED UP WITH OTHER APPROPRIATE OFFICIALS. WE HAVE
STRESSED POINTS THAT: A) OUTSIDE WORLD CURIOUS
ABOUT NEW REGIME WHICH HAS POSITIVE STORY TO TELL ABOUT
ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN COMBATING DROUGHT AND TACKLING
NATION'S PROBLEMS AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS CAN GET WORD
OUT IF THEY CAN ONLY FIND SOMEONE IN AUTHORITY TO TALK
TO INSTEAD OF GETTING RUN AROUND; B) AMERICAN JOURNALISTS
PLAYED ROLE IN CALLING ATTENTION TO DROUGHT CONDITIONS WHICH LED
TO OUTPOURING OF RELIEF SUPPLIES. GON IS ON RECORD AS
ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THESE SUPPLIES AVERTED FAMINE. SIMILARLY,
AMERICAN JOURNALISTS CAN HELP IN MOBILIZING FURTHER
SUPPORT WHERE SOFT SPOTS IN DROUGHT SITUATION CONTINUE TO
EXIST BUT THEY NEED ACCESS TO DO SO.

5. WE HAVE URGED GON APPOINT SPOKESMAN SO THAT
JOURNALISTS WHO ARE NOT ALLOWED OR DO NOT HAVE
TIME TO GO INTO INTERIOR CAN GET BRIEFING ON DROUGHT
SITUATION AND POLICIES OF NEW GOVERNMENT. GON OFFICIALS
ACKNOWLEDGE MERIT OF THESE POINTS BUT IN TERMS OF
RESULTS WE HAVE BEEN AS EFFECTIVE AS PIROGUES PADDLING
UPSTREAM ON NIGER RIVER AGAINST GUINEA SWELL.

6. WE DOUBT SITUATION WILL CHANGE IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE FOR
VARIETY OF REASONS INCLUDING: A) SENSE OF NATIONAL
DIGNITY WHICH MAKES NIGERIENS RESENT PROTRAYAL OF THEIR
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CITIZENS OVERSEAS AS PEOPLE WITH BLOATED BELLIES BEGGING
FOR FOOD; B) DEGREE OF CHUVINISM AND NATIONALISM IN
NEW GOVERNMENT WHICH EXPRESSES ITSELF IN OPPOSITION TO
FOREIGNERS "MESSING AROUND" IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS;
C) CENTRALIZATION OF ALL QUESTIONS INVOLVING TRAVEL OF
FOREIGNERS IN NIGER IN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR WHICH IS
ONE OF PRESIDENT'S PORTFOLIOS. ALL SUCH MATTERS TO TO
HIM AND HIS DECISIONS ARE FREQUENTLY BASED ON
INADEQUATE INFORMATION AND ARE PEREMPTORY; D) LACK OF
APPRECIATION OF THE NEED TO PAY SOME
ATTENTION TO FOREIGN SOURCES SUPPORTING
RELIEF EFFORTS; E) FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND ROLE OF FREE
PRESS IN COUNTRY WHERE THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO PRESS; AND
F) BASIC INABILITY OF UNDERMANNED, OVERWORKED, UNSOPHISTICATED
AND USUALLY UNCOORDINATED GOVERNMENT TO DEAL WITH AD HOC

SITUATIONS WHICH CHARACTERIZE JOURNALISM.

7. GIVEN THIS SITUATION WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL JOURNALISTS CHECKING IN WITH WASHINGTON AGENCIES OR ADDRESSEE EMBASSIES REGARDING VISITS TO NIGER BE ADVISED AS FOLLOWS:

A) GON PROCEDURES FOR VISITING JOURNALISTS REQUIRE THAT THEY PROVIDE AS MUCH ADVANCE NOTICE AS POSSIBLE AND DETAILED STATEMENT LISTING PURPOSES OF VISIT AND DESIRED SCHEDULE WITHIN COUNTRY. ON ARRIVAL THEY SHOULD CHECK IN WITH THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION WHILE EMBASSY SUBMITS ABOVE STATEMENT IN OFFICIAL NOTE TO MFA, WHICH WILL IN TURN SUBMIT WHOLE MATTER TO INTERIOR MINISTRY. THIS PROCESS TAKES TIME. A JOURNALIST WILL BE LUCKY TO GET AN ANSWER IN LESS THAN A WEEK. MEANWHILE HE IS NOT AUTHORIZED TO TAKE PICTURES OR TRAVEL IN THE INTERIOR. INTERVIEWS IN NIAMEY ARE POSSIBLE.

B) ALTERNATIVE COURSE IS FOR JOURNALIST TO VISIT NIGER QUIETLY, NOT DELCARE HIMSELF, MAKE HIS OWN ARRANGEMENTS, TRAVEL TO INTERIOR AND FILE HIS STORIES ON WAY OUT. JOURNALISTS CAN GET AWAY WITH THIS BUT PHOTOGRAPHERS, TV CREWS, ETC., HAVE MORE DIFFICULTY. THOSE JOURNALISTS SPEAKING FRENCH WHO HAVE LOCAL CONTACTS HAVE TRAVELED THIS ROUTE SUCCESSFULLY AND WITHOUT ANY DIFFICULTY. HOWEVER, AMERICAN JORNALISTS WHO ARE STRANGERS TO AREA AND DO NOT SPEAK FRENCH WILL PROBABLY RUN INTO TROUBLE IF THEY FREEWHEEL AND MAY BE CONFINED TO NIAMEY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OR ASKED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY. EITHER WAY, JOURNALISTS SHOULD BE WARNED THEY FACE FRUSTRATING TIME AND WILL PROBABLY LEAVE MORE IN ANGER THAN IN SORROW. EITHER WAY, ALSO, WE WOULD LIKE TO GET OUT OF BUSINESS OR WRITING NOTES TO MFA ON BEHALF OF AMERICN JOURNALISTS, WHICH ESTABLISHES RELATIONSHIP WITH AMERICAN JOURNALISTS WHICH WE DO NOT THINK THEIR PARENT ORGANIZATIONS IN USA WOULD FIND CONGENIAL. SHORT OF THAT WE WILL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN FOR OUR COMPATRIOTS, IF THEY AFTER THIS STILL DECIDE TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF A TRIP TO NIGER.HECK

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